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A
SHORT NARRATIVE
OF
ISAAC SHARPLES,



A
SHORT NARRATIVE

OF OUR DEAR AND WORTHY FRIEND,

ISAAC SHARPLES, *K*

LATE OF HITCHIN:

Written by himself sometime before his Decease.

TO WHICH ARE ADDED,

SOME OF HIS SOLID AND WEIGHTY EXPRESSIONS,

A LITTLE BEFORE HIS END.

A NEW EDITION.

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1798.

SHORT MATHEMATICAL

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

IN THE



BY

JOHN

LONDON

A

SHORT NARRATIVE, &c.

BEING now about the 80th year of my age, it is in my mind to leave some few hints of the Lord's tender dealings with me from my youth to this time, for the information and encouragement of those I may leave behind me. I was born near Prescott, in Lancashire, about the year 1702, my parents, William and Phebe Sharples, being members of that meeting. My mother died about three years after, leaving six children,

who, by her removal, were subjected to much hardship. My father, for want of keeping his place, forfeited his unity with friends, by which the family became dispersed, and none of us continued in the society.

When I was about twelve years of age, by the persuasion of some of my father's relations, I was sprinkled at Ormskirk; from which time I continued to frequent the public worship, until I joined friends. At about fourteen I was placed out apprentice to a taylor, where I suffered much; but my master, to whom I was bound, not having sufficient employment for me, after I had served about half my time, turned me over to a friend for the remainder of the term, whereby I got some relief. And in this family they would often be speaking of my mother, who was esteemed a valuable friend.

Having

Having now frequent opportunities of being in friends company, and observing their regular lives and conversation, it gave me a secret liking towards them; but looking upon myself to be a settled member of the established church (so called), and there being most liberty for worldly indulgence, I endeavoured to satisfy myself in that way as long as I could; being often strongly tempted by youthful lusts after the common evils that are in the world; yet I was mercifully preserved from the grosser part thereof. At length it pleased the Lord, who had long followed me by his secret rebukes, to break in upon my soul by his powerful love, and awakening visitations, to shew me, that was not my rest, because it was polluted. My present state and condition being now clearly laid open to my views, by the light that shined into my dark heart, I saw sin to be

exceeding sinful, and that it was that which separated me from my God, and caused him to withhold good things from me. I was also favoured to see my great loss of time, and neglect of duty, and how far I was behind in my day's work : for although the Lord was pleased to wink at the time of ignorance, yet now I found his call and command was to repentance, and amendment of life. And when I set my heart to seek him, I met with great inward opposition from the combined force of my three potent enemies, the world, the flesh, and the devil, who assaulted me with manifold temptations. But for ever magnified be my gracious God, he made good the saying of our blessed Saviour ; " My Father is greater than all, and none shall be able to pluck you out of my Father's hands." Thus, although I was like one cast out and forsaken, and in great measure destitute

stitute of those natural advantages many are favoured with (my education being low), yet, in this state of weakness and ignorance, the Lord took me under his care and protection.

When out of my apprenticeship, having but few friends or relations that took much notice of me, I concluded to travel in the way of my trade, and went to London, where I worked some time. Afterwards I proceeded westward by way of Oxford, Cirencester, and Bristol, intending to travel through the western counties, and return again to London. But I had not gone far from Bristol before kind Providence, watching over me for my good, mercifully interposed, directing my way in his wisdom; he was pleased to put a stop to my roving mind, and to convince me of the truth of that saying, "It is not in man that walketh to direct his own steps."

Meeting

Meeting with employment in my trade in the county of Somerset, and being convinced of the blessed truth, I settled amongst friends, and continued in that part of the country some years; when, about the year 1724, my mouth was first opened in the work of the ministry, at a meeting at Claverham in the said county, which I attended for some years, before I went much abroad. After my stay here about twelve years, I entered into a married state with Esther Thurston, of Thornbury, in Gloucestershire, widow, where I then settled. We lived together in true unity about five years, when she was removed from me by death. During my residence here, the Lord laid a concern upon me to pay a religious visit to divers northern counties, and Scotland, also South and North Wales; with which I acquainted my friends, and having their concurrence
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and certificate, I set forward, endeavouring to look with a single eye to my good guide, who was pleased to enable me to perform this service to my own comfort; and the satisfaction of my friends: for which, and for his preservation and care over me every way unto this time, I bow the knee of my soul to my gracious and merciful God. Although I sometimes set out in great inward poverty, yet I was secretly supported by an invisible hand, that I could truly say, the Lord was my shepherd, and bountifully supplied all my wants, so as many times to make my cup to run over, filling my heart with his love; that I can now say, What shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits, who has been my morning light, and I humbly hope will be my evening song?

After this journey I continued at Thornbury about five years longer, visiting the meetings of my friends in most of the western and north-west counties, as the Lord was pleased to open my way. And about the year 1743, a concern was laid upon me to visit the principal towns in the county of Devon, where there were no friends; and notwithstanding the undertaking looked difficult and arduous, yet as I was preserved in a faithful obedience to the Lord's requirings, he who put me forth was pleased to go before me in such a manner, that notwithstanding it was sometimes attended with very close exercise, yet through his divine assistance I was enabled to perform this service to a good degree of satisfaction, and to meet with no opposition; except in one place from an angry priest. At several towns I had meetings in the streets and market-houses.

houses. I afterwards went into Dorsetshire and Hampshire, and passed over into the isle of Jersey, in company with my friend Jeremiah Waring.

1744. This year I visited Ireland.

1745. Visited several western counties as far as Cornwall, and the circular Yearly Meeting there.

1746. This year I entered a second time into a married state with Mary, daughter of our worthy friends Joseph and Mary Ransom, of Hitchin, in Hertfordshire, where I then settled. She has been a true help-meet to me, we having now lived together in great unity about thirty-six years.

After

After my marriage I visited most of the counties of England and Wales at different times, as the Lord was pleased to open my way, and enable me for it ; through all which I have to acknowledge with thankfulness to my God, in whose service I went forth, that I lacked nothing, but was wonderfully preserved and supported ; yet have nothing to glory in but that arm that was made bare for my help, and have done no more than was my duty to do. I have had many public services in barns and other places where there were no friends settled, and have attended many marriages and burials not herein particularly noticed, whereby I have endeavoured to fill up my time : and under an humbling sense of the Lord's goodness, I can now look back with satisfaction and thankfulness to him who has enabled me so far to do my day's work in
the

the day-time, and am now favoured in my old age to drink of that rock, out of which flow the issues of life ; so that now, through his merciful aid, I can set up my Ebenezer, and say, “Hitherto the Lord has helped me.”

I was called into the vineyard when young, and have ever since found work enough to do, either in digging, watering, or pruning ; it not being a time for slothful servants, nor will it do to put that candle, which has been lighted in us, under a bed or a bushel. The Lord did not find me out amongst the wise and prudent of this world ; but he took me from the stones of the street, where, in his wisdom and goodness, he has often raised up children to Abraham. I have now to rejoice my day's work is so near a happy close, having patiently now only to wait my appointed time, until my change shall come.

(Here ends the account our dear friend gives of himself.)

WHEN, through the infirmities attending old age, he was rendered incapable of going far from home, he diligently attended his own and neighbouring meetings, frequently appearing therein in short but lively exhortations, endeavouring to stir up the minds of friends to a faithful attention to their duty. He had a spirit of discernment beyond many, and an excellent gift in the discipline of the church, having a clear sight of the insufficiency of the outward form, without the influence of the divine power to support it to edification. His ministry was plain and powerful, often reaching the witness of truth in the hearts of his hearers.

In supplication he was inward and weighty, an awful solemnity covering his spirit, whereby

by he was frequently favoured with near access to the throne of Divine Grace.

An innocent chearfulness, tempered with gravity, adorned his conversation, and his conduct was a pattern of meekness, moderation, and love, which gained him general esteem. Thus persevering in true watchfulness, the language of the apostle (which he was known frequently to repeat) may be truly adopted concerning him, “ Our
“ rejoicing is this, the testimony of our con-
“ science, that in simplicity and godly sincere-
“ rity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the
“ grace of God, we have had our conversation
“ in the world.”

In his last illness, being sensible his end was approaching, he expressed himself after this manner :

“ I feel

“ I feel my natural faculties fail much ;
 “ I desire to be content with the Lord’s
 “ will, and to wait all the days of my ap-
 “ pointed time, until my change shall come ;
 “ and it is pleasant to think I draw so near
 “ the end of my race, and can now set up
 “ my Ebenezer, and say, Hitherto the Lord
 “ has been my shield, and exceeding great
 “ reward.”

At another time a few friends sitting by
 him, he said, “ I find my body advancing
 “ apace towards its dissolution ; but death
 “ is no king of terrors to me ; I hope I
 “ shall be ready for my final change : and
 “ although our meeting in this place is but
 “ small, it affords me a secret satisfaction
 “ to see the forming Hand at work in some
 “ of our youth, and that they are measur-
 “ ably called into service ; which I hope
 “ they

“ they will give up to. The world, and
 “ the things of it, has lain too near, and
 “ hurt the growth of some who might have
 “ made further advances, had they not
 “ been hindered thereby.”

- At another time, speaking of the state of our
 religious society, he remarked, “ Although
 “ many have fallen, and some degenerated
 “ into form, yet I believe the truth is kept
 “ to in as much simplicity amongst us as
 “ amongst any people. I have often thought
 “ of Paul’s address to the Galatians, his par-
 “ ticular converts, where he says, I marvel
 “ that ye are so soon removed unto another
 “ gospel, which,” says he, “ is not another,
 “ but there may be some that trouble you,
 “ and would pervert the gospel of Christ;
 “ but though we, or an angel from heaven,
 “ preach any other gospel, let him be ac-
 “ cursed.”

“ cursed.” He then observed there was but one gospel, however some may have degenerated into form, and called it the gospel.

He was favoured to feel very little pain, his complaint being a gradual decay of nature. He kept his bed about two or three days, during which time he said but little, although he seemed quite sensible to the last. About an hour before his end he turned himself in his bed, and seemed to fall into a sleep; soon after which he quietly departed without sigh or groan, the 18th day of the 5th month, 1784, about the eighty-second year of his age: a minister about sixty years.

Thus our dear and worthy friend, after a long and well-spent life, finished his course, and we doubt not hath entered that glorious
immortality

immortality of rest and peace prepared for the righteous. His remains were interred in friends burial-ground at Hitchin the 23d, after a large and solid meeting of friends and neighbours.

ADVERTISEMENT.

23 JY 69

A Testimony from the Monthly Meeting of Baldock, and Quarterly Meeting of Hertfordshire, was given forth concerning this our honourable ancient friend ; but as the substance thereof is contained in the preceding Narrative, and the addition beginning at page 16, to insert it is thought an unnecessary repetition.

F I N I S.

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